

out the facts. And that's what the Commission's job is meant to do, and that's what the American people want to see. I'm looking forward to people hearing her.

All right, got to go to work. Thanks. Good to see you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:31 a.m. at Central Piedmont Community College-Central Campus. In his remarks, he referred to L. Paul "Jerry" Bremer III, Presidential Envoy to Iraq; Iraqi Shiite leader Muqtada Al Sadr; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. A reporter referred to Thomas H. Kean, Chairman, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (9/11 Commission). A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Luncheon in Charlotte

April 5, 2004

Thank you all. Thank you all very much. Thanks for coming. Thank you all. Thanks for the warm welcome. Last time I was supposed to be here, it wasn't going to be so warm. [Laughter] And I want to thank you for your understanding about the mayor telling me not to come. [Laughter] He blamed it on the police chief. [Laughter] Actually, it was the right call. And I want to thank you all for your patience. Thank you for letting me come back.

I generally try to stay on time. I'm running a little late. I met with some special people in order for me to—before I came over here, so thanks. There's nothing worse than a politician making people wait. I think I've got a pretty good excuse. I met with the family of a fellow who was killed in Iraq. It's part of my duty; it's part of my obligation. It was an uplifting experience to meet with a family that loves their country. I told the dad and the mom and the wife that we'd stay the course, we'd do what's right, and their son would not have died in vain.

If you're noticing me working my shoulder a little bit, it's because after dinner I've got to go out and deliver a hopping fastball to open up the baseball season. I can't run very far—just hope I can throw 60 foot and 6 inches. [Laughter]

And the Vice President, by the way, is venturing out to the mound. He's been warming up. It turns out we don't need a radar gun on him either. [Laughter] Speaking about the Vice President, he's the finest Vice President our Nation has ever had. Mother heard me say that and said, "Wait a minute, boy." [Laughter]

I'm sorry Laura's not here. She's with her mother in Midland, Texas. We were both raised in Midland. She's helping her mom move out of her—the home she was raised in. Her mom is getting up in years, and Laura is doing her duty as a loyal daughter. Let me just tell you, this is a lady who's got her life in perspective. Her faith and her family come first. And I love her. She is a fabulous First Lady for the country. She sends her love. I'm going to see her tonight in Crawford. We're going to spend the Easter time in Crawford. I'm going to be working out at the Western White House, as we call it—the Southwestern White House. But I'll give her—you her best.

I appreciate Thompson and Hance. Those boys delivered a fine introduction, didn't they? They are silver-tongued devils from—[laughter]—Charlotte. But I want to thank Ken and Jim for their leadership on this event. I'm proud to have you on my team. I appreciate you working so hard to make this fundraiser so successful. I appreciate Ed McMahan as well for being one of the event chairmen. Thank you for your help.

I remember campaigning here and saying to the people of North Carolina that the best choice they had for the United States Senate was Elizabeth Dole, that she'd do a great job for the citizens of this State. And she has—really proud of the job Elizabeth is doing. She works hard. She's well versed on the issues. She's articulate. She's making a big difference, a big difference in a short period of time on the floor of the Senate. I don't know about the company you're keeping there with Senator Faircloth. But—[laughter].

I appreciate so very much my friend Congressman Cass Ballenger for joining us today. Thank you for being here, Cass. Sue Myrick, as well, the great congresslady from this part of the world—thank you, Sue, for coming.

Congressman Robin Hayes is with us today. Robin, I appreciate your friendship.

And finally, the next United States Senator from the great State of North Carolina, Richard Burr. He'll be a good one. And I want him to win.

I appreciate Pat McCrory, the mayor. The mayor's doing a fine job. He's a good fellow. I've known him a while, and he's doing a really good for the people. I thank all the State and local officials who are here.

I want to thank my friend Jim Culbertson for his hard work, and Dr. Aldona Wos. I want to thank Ferrell Blount. I want to thank Jim Cain. I want to thank all my friends for working so hard to make this event a successful event.

I appreciate Teresa Earnhardt being here. Teresa, thank you for coming. It's—going to Daytona 500 is—it's a pretty interesting experience, if you've never been there. And starting the race is even more interesting. It's—I want to thank the Earnhardt family for their—for being such great Americans.

I want to thank Ric Flair, professional wrestler. He's with us today. Big Ric, I'm proud you're here. Thank you for coming.

I want to thank the grassroots activists who are here. We won North Carolina last time. We're going to win it this time. And I appreciate your help.

And I'm ready for the contest. I just want you to know I'm looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to campaigning. I'm looking forward to talking about what I intend to do. I'm looking forward to reminding people, in the last 3 years we've achieved great things. But most importantly, I'm looking forward to reminding people about our positive vision, a positive vision to win the war on terror, a positive vision for extending peace and freedom throughout the world, a positive vision for creating jobs and promoting opportunity and compassion at home. I'll leave no doubt where we stand, and we're going to win on the 2nd of November.

The last 3 years have brought serious challenges, and we have given serious answers. We came to office with the stock market in decline and an economy headed into recession. We delivered historic tax relief, and now our economy is the fastest growing of any major industrialized nation.

We had to confront corporate crimes that cost people their jobs and their savings, so we passed strong corporate reforms, and we made it abundantly clear that we will not tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America.

We saw grief and war arrive on a quiet September morning, so we have pursued the terrorist enemy across the world. We've captured or killed many key leaders of the Al Qaida network. And the rest will learn there is no cave or hole deep enough to hide from American justice.

We confronted the dangers of state-sponsored terror and the spread of weapons of mass destruction, so we ended two of the most violent and dangerous regimes on Earth. We freed over 50 million people. Once again, America is proud to lead the armies of liberation.

When Dick Cheney and I came to Washington, we found a military that was underfunded and underappreciated, so we gave our military the resources and respect they deserve. And today, no one can question the skill and the strength and the spirit of the United States military.

It is the President's job to confront problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents or future generations. A President needs to step up and make the tough decisions and keep his commitments. And that is how I will continue to lead our great Nation.

Great events will turn on this election. The man who sits in the Oval Office will set the course of the war on terror and the direction of our economy. The security and prosperity of America are at stake.

I finally got an opponent. *[Laughter]* I'm running against an experienced Senator who has built up quite a record. In fact, Senator Kerry has been in Washington long enough to take both sides of just about every issue. *[Laughter]* He voted for the PATRIOT Act, for NAFTA, for the No Child Left Behind Act, and for the use of force in Iraq. Now he opposes the PATRIOT Act, NAFTA, the No Child Left Behind Act, and the liberation of Iraq. He's been on both sides of so many big issues that if he could find a third side, I imagine he'd take it. *[Laughter]*

Someone recently asked my opponent why he had voted against the \$87-billion funding bill to help our troops in Iraq. Here's what he said—he actually said this, “I actually did vote for the \$87 billion, before I voted against it.” [Laughter] End of quote. [Laughter] The President must speak clearly.

We will have a clear choice in the campaign this year, the choice between keeping the tax relief that is moving our economy forward or putting the burden of higher taxes back on the American people. We'll have a choice between an America that leads the world with strength and confidence or an America that is uncertain in the face of danger. I look forward to making that choice very clear.

The other side hasn't offered much in the way of strategies to win the war or policies to expand the economy. All we hear from that side is a lot of old bitterness and partisan anger. Anger is not an agenda for the future of America.

I look forward to taking on the big issues with optimism and resolve. I will make it clear that I stand ready to lead this Nation for 4 more years.

A big issue for every family in America is the Federal tax burden. With the largest tax relief since Ronald Reagan was the President, we have left more money in the hands that earned it. By spending and investing and to help create new jobs, the American people have used their money far better than the Federal Government would have.

This economy is strong, and it is getting stronger. Economic growth is strong. America added 308,000 new jobs in March, the highest monthly job growth total in almost 4 years. And since August, our economy has added over three-quarter-of-a-million new jobs. The second half of 2003, the economy grew at its fastest rate in nearly 20 years. Interest rates are low. Mortgage rates are low. Manufacturing activity is on the increase. Disposable income is rising. Homeownership is at an alltime historic high. The tax relief we passed is working.

There's a clear difference when it comes to taxes. When we passed the tax increase in the child credit to help families, my opponent voted against it. When we reduced the marriage penalty, he voted against it. When

we created a lower 10-percent tax rate for working families, he voted against it. When we reduced the tax rate on dividends that many seniors depend on, he voted “no.” When we gave small businesses tax incentives to expand and hire, he voted against it. When we passed a phase-out of the death tax, he voted against it. I think there's a pattern here. [Laughter]

When tax increases are proposed, it's a lot easier to get a “yes” vote out of him. Over the years, he has voted over 350 times for higher taxes on the American people, including the biggest tax increase in American history. He's supported higher gas taxes 11 times, and once favored a tax increase of 50 cents a gallon. That would cost you another \$5 or more every time you fill up your tank. For that kind of money, he ought to at least throw in a free car wash. [Laughter]

My opponent proposes a lot of new Government spending, about \$1.7 trillion at last count. And the campaign has just barely gotten started. He said he's going to pay for it by raising the taxes on the rich people. He's got a problem. See, to cover all the new spending, Senator Kerry would need to eliminate every single one of the tax reductions we've passed, and then he'd still have to raise taxes on top of that. The marriage penalty would go up; the child credit would go down; taxes on small businesses would rise. It turns out if you have a job, a child, or a dollar to spare, Senator Kerry thinks you're rich enough to pay more taxes. Fortunately, we're not going to give him that chance. Higher taxes now would undermine growth and destroy jobs. To help grow the American economy and to create more jobs, I have a better idea: We should make all the tax cuts permanent.

And there is more we can do to make sure we maintain economic growth. We need spending discipline in the Nation's Capital. I have a plan to protect small-business owners and employees from frivolous and junk lawsuits. I have a plan to help control the cost of health care by giving people better access to association health plans and tax-free health savings accounts. And the Senate must pass medical liability reform in order to control the cost of health care.

Rather than to wall ourselves off from the world, and rather than to listen to the economic isolationists, we need to level the playing field and open up more markets for North Carolina's farmers and ranchers and manufacturers and entrepreneurs.

In order to make sure this country continues to grow and people can find work at home, we need an energy plan that encourages conservation, that makes our electricity systems more reliable, that encourages clean coal technology, that allows for exploration. This Nation must become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

These are ways to keep jobs here at home and to make sure the job base expands. But my opponent is against every one of these job creating measures. Empty talk about jobs and economic isolationism will not get anybody hired. This country needs to reelect a pro-growth, pro-small-business, pro-entrepreneur President, George W. Bush.

Our future also depends on America's leadership in the world. The momentum of freedom in our time is strong, but we still face serious dangers. Al Qaida is wounded but not broken. Terrorists are testing our will in Afghanistan and Iraq. We still face dangers in North Korea and Iran. If America shows weakness and uncertainty in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This will not happen on my watch.

This Nation is strong and confident in the cause of freedom, and today, no friend or enemy doubts the word of the United States. America and our allies gave an ultimatum to the terror regime in Afghanistan. The Taliban chose defiance, and the Taliban are no longer in power. America and our allies gave an ultimatum to the terror regime in Iraq. The dictator chose defiance, and now the dictator sits in a prison cell.

September the 11th, 2001, taught a lesson I will never forget, a lesson America must never forget: America must confront threats before they fully materialize. In Iraq, my administration looked at the intelligence information, and we saw a threat. The United States Congress looked at the intelligence, and they saw a threat. The United Nations Security Council looked at the intelligence, and it saw a threat. The previous administration and Congress looked at the intelligence

and made regime change in Iraq the policy of our country.

In 2002, the United Nations Security Council yet again demanded a full accounting of Saddam Hussein's weapons programs. As he had for over a decade, Saddam Hussein refused to comply. So I had a choice: either take the word of a madman, take the word of a man who had used weapons of mass destruction on his own people, or take action to defend America. Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

My opponent admits that Saddam Hussein was a threat. He just didn't support my decision to remove Saddam from power. Perhaps he was hoping Saddam would lose the next Iraqi election. *[Laughter]*

We showed the dictator and a watching world that America means what it says. Because our coalition acted, Saddam's torture chambers are closed. Because we acted, Iraq's weapons programs are ended forever. Because we acted, nations like Libya have gotten the message and renounced their own weapons programs. Because we acted, an example of democracy is rising at the very heart of the Middle East. Because we acted, the world is more free. Because we acted, America is more secure.

We still face thugs and terrorists in Iraq who would rather go on killing innocent people than accept the advance of liberty. And there's a reason why. They know that a free Iraq will be a major defeat in the cause of terror. They hate freedom. They can't stand the thought of a free society. And what they're trying to do is they're trying to shake our will. They're trying to shake the will of America. America will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins.

We are on the offense. We will stay on the offense. We will aggressively strike the terrorists in Iraq. We will defeat them there so we do not have to face them in our own country. We're calling on other nations to help Iraq build a free society. They understand what we know: A free Iraq will make the world more peaceful. And we're standing with those brave Iraqi citizens who've endured Saddam Hussein and who now long for self-government.

These aren't easy tasks. I understand that. But they are essential tasks. America will finish what we have begun, and we will win this essential victory in the war on terror.

On national security, Americans have the clearest possible choice. My opponent says he approves of bold action in the world, but only if other countries do not object. I'm all for united action, and so are our 34 coalition partners in Iraq right now. Yet America must never allow our national security decisions to be made by leaders of other countries.

Some are skeptical that the war on terror is really a war at all. My opponent said this: "The war on terror is far less of a military operation and far more of an intelligence-gathering, law enforcement operation." I disagree.

Our Nation followed this approach after the World Trade Center was bombed in 1993. The matter was handled in the courts and thought by some to be settled. But the terrorists were still training in Afghanistan. They were plotting in other nations. They were drawing up more ambitious plans. After the chaos and carnage of September the 11th, it is not enough to serve our enemies with legal papers. With those attacks, the terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States of America, and war is what they got.

Our men and women in the military are taking great risks and doing great work. At bases across our country and the world, I have had the privilege of meeting those who defend our country and sacrifice for our security. I've seen their great decency and unselfish courage. And I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, the cause of freedom is in good hands.

This Nation is prosperous and strong, yet we need to remember that our greatest strength is in the hearts and souls of our citizens. We're strong because of the values we try to live by, courage and compassion, reverence and integrity. We're strong because of the institutions that help give us direction and purpose, our families, our schools, our religious congregations. These values and institutions are fundamental to our lives, and they deserve the respect of our Government.

We stand for the fair treatment of faith-based groups so they can receive Federal

support for their works of compassion and healing. We will not stand for government discrimination against people of faith.

We stand for welfare reforms that require work and strengthen marriage, which have helped millions of Americans find independence and dignity. We will not stand for any attempt to weaken those reforms and send people back into lives of dependence.

We stand for a culture of life in which every person counts and every person matters. We will not stand for the treatment of any life as a commodity to be experimented upon, to be exploited, or cloned.

We stand for the confirmation of judges who strictly and faithfully interpret the law. We will not stand for judges who undermine democracy by legislating from the bench or judges who try to remake the values of America by court order.

We stand for a culture of responsibility in America. We're changing the culture of this country from one that has said, "If it feels good, do it," and "If you got a problem, blame somebody else," to a culture in which each of us are responsible for the decisions we make in life. If you're fortunate enough to be a mother or father, you are responsible for loving your child with all your heart. If you're worried about the quality of the education in the community in which you live, you're responsible for doing something about it. If you're a CEO in corporate America, you're responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees. And in the new responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving our neighbor just like we'd like to be loved ourselves.

For all Americans, these years in our history will stand apart. There are quiet times in the life of a nation when little is expected of its leaders. These aren't one of those times. You and I are living in a period when the stakes are high, the challenges are difficult, a time when firm resolve is needed. None of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began.

On September the 14th, 2001, I stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers. I'll never forget the day. There were workers in hardhats yelling at me, "Whatever it takes." I remember walking a ropeline, a guy said to me, looked me right in the eye and said, "Don't

let me down.” As we all did that day, these men and women who were searching through the rubble took it personally. I took it personally. I have a responsibility that goes on. I will never relent in bringing justice to our enemies. I will defend the security of America, whatever it takes.

In these times, I’ve also been witness to the character of this Nation. Not so long ago, some had their doubts about the American character, about our capacity to meet serious challenges or our willingness to serve a cause greater than self-interest. Americans gave their answer. I’ve seen the unselfish courage of our troops. I’ve seen the heroism of Americans in the face of danger. I’ve seen the spirit of service and compassion renewed in our country. We’ve all seen our Nation unite in common purpose when it mattered most.

We’ll need all these qualities for the work ahead. We have a war to win. And the world is counting on us to lead the cause of freedom and peace. We have a duty to spread opportunity to every part of America. This is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it, and we know that for our country, the best days lie ahead. May God bless you all.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:32 p.m. at the Charlotte Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Pat McCrory of Charlotte; Darrel Stephens, chief of police, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department; Ken Thompson and Jim Hance, event cochairmen; North Carolina State Representative W. Edwin “Ed” McMahan; former Senator Lauch Faircloth of North Carolina; Jim Culbertson and Aldona Wos, North Carolina State finance chairs, Bush-Cheney ’04, Inc.; Ferrell Blount, chairman, and Jim Cain, national committeeman, North Carolina Republican Party; and Teresa Earnhardt, chief executive officer and president, Dale Earnhardt, Inc.

Statement on Signing Legislation on Amendments to the Mexico-United States Agreement on the Border Environment Cooperation Commission and the North American Development Bank

April 5, 2004

Today, I have signed into law H.R. 254, “To authorize the President of the United States to agree to certain amendments to the Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the United Mexican States concerning the establishment of a Border Environment Cooperation Commission and a North American Development Bank, and for other purposes.” The Act is intended to implement an agreement between the United States and Mexico to accelerate the delivery of environmental infrastructure projects on the border by improving the operations of the Border Environment Cooperation Commission and the North American Development Bank.

Section 546 of Public Law 103–182, as added by section 1 of the Act, purports to direct the President to instruct United States representatives on the Board of Directors of the North American Development Bank to take a particular position with respect to certain grant proposals. Under the Constitution, the President alone is charged with developing the position of the United States in international fora. The executive branch will accordingly interpret this provision as a non-binding recommendation from the Congress.

Sections 2(5) and 2(6) of the Act purport to require the annual report of the Secretary of the Treasury to include a description of discussions between the United States and Mexican governments. In order to avoid intrusion into the President’s negotiating authority and ability to maintain the confidentiality of diplomatic negotiations, the executive branch will not interpret this provision